In this doc:

Page 1-2
Overview of current situation

Page 3
Demands / phone zap information

For updates, follow NOHHARRM Instagram.

https://www.instagram.com/nohharrm/

@nohharrm

(New Orleans Homeless and Houseless Advocacy, Research, and Rights Monitoring)

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR NEIGHBORS?

PROFILING, SWEEPS, CRIMINALIZATION, and WAREHOUSES

On 1/15/25, state officials began relocating unhoused individuals residing in and near downtown and the French Quarter – from the streets, parks, and encampments - to a warehouse in Gentilly. This was done with less than 48 hours' notice and unhoused individuals were informed that "everyone must comply" and that "failure to do so may result in enforcement actions or legal proceedings." No other options were offered in the notice given, meaning that the status of being visibly unhoused in downtown New Orleans is now costing individuals their freedom of movement: the choice is to either live in a congregate temporary warehouse shelter or risk potential arrest. There is no messaging on where unhoused individuals are allowed to reside if they either don't want to live at the warehouse or if the warehouse's 200 beds fill up before they can be admitted. Will an unhoused person's inability to access a shelter bed due to the site's capacity constraints be considered non-compliance? Where can they go?

Leave our unhoused neighbors be -
Sweeps aren't safe for you or me!

The discrimination inherent in profiling unhoused New Orleanians – who were approached by police inside and outside of encampment settings in the day and a half preceding the sweeps and informed of this forcible relocation plan (if they were approached at all – some people received no notice) – indicates we are taking the latest frightening turn toward criminalizing homelessness, which is inherently tied with criminalizing poverty, individuals of color, and individuals with disabilities. The governor's address about this plan, released on 1/13/2025, stated his forcible relocation plan was in the interest of "every citizen's safety and security." Notably, our unhoused neighbors are not made safer by being threatened with arrest or being subjected to these sweeps. During previous state sweeps this Fall, unhoused individuals lost items ranging from medications and phones to work tools and photos of a deceased parent.

Moving people's lives in 48 hours?
That's an abuse of government powers!

The "transitional center" site to which our neighbors are being forcibly relocated is 5.5 miles from downtown. It lacks eye-level windows or a sidewalk, and it is a 25-minute walk from the nearest bus stop. Residents will meet with service provider staff outside in a tent. A long list of services has been advertised as being available at the site, and we genuinely hope those services are indeed available there. The private equity-backed staffing group, The Workforce Group, who has been contracted by the state to provide services at the shelter, is urgently hiring staff for the site, though their own website shows it has had some roles for the project posted since December 18, 2024 – more than three full weeks before local entities or unhoused individuals were notified of this plan and almost two weeks before the terrorist attack on Bourbon Street that is being used to in part justify this forced relocation occurred.

We want houses, not warehouses!

And what will this warehousing cost us? Not counting unknown costs for the Louisiana State Police to forcibly transport 200 individuals there or to pursue legal action against, arrest, and/or incarcerate those unhoused individuals who might refuse to be relocated there, the warehouse site itself carries a price tag of $11.4 million for two months or $16.2 million for three months - about $80,000 per each of the 200 beds. At the three-month price, 200 unhoused individuals could each be provided with 75 months – or 6.3 years – of rental assistance at the fair-market rate for a studio apartment in Orleans Parish. Or 1260 individuals could be given one year of rental assistance at studio apartment rate; 1092 individuals could be given one year of rental assistance at the one-bedroom rate. Such allocations toward rapid rehousing and rental assistance could effectively end the homelessness of almost all individual adults currently experiencing homelessness in New Orleans for the coming year.

How many people could we house today?

A thousand or more if we had it our way!

The state has shown it can move quickly when it wants to, harnessing funding and resources on a large scale in a short amount of time. This means the state could also change its course if it chose to do so. If the state wants to spend $16.2 million on a warehouse on a few days' or weeks' notice, then it can also rapidly create other options for unhoused individuals. Today, the state could choose to invest in permanent supportive housing instead of in warehouse shelters, in rental assistance instead of in policing, and in increased transit access to jobs and services instead of in bus tickets out of town for unhoused individuals who lack work.

Homes are What Ends Homelessness!

We agree that encampments are not the safest place for human beings to live. However, significant data shows us that sweeps and forcible relocations into sanctioned encampments don't improve housing or health outcomes. We want our neighbors to be given more dignified, humane, and effective options to end their homelessness. A bed in a warehouse does not end someone's homelessness, and even if the warehouse site proves itself to have sufficient services and be an effective bridge to housing for some of its residents, a forced relocation by police forces should not be an acceptable means by which to bring people there, nor should imposing a limit on what areas of the city a homeless persons can exist in be an acceptable new norm. Our unhoused neighbors are indeed our neighbors, and they are New Orleanians who have specific family, social, personal, and professional ties to our city. A forced relocation stands to sever these ties, hurting all of us. The concurrent traumas of being profiled because of one's poverty and houselessness, receiving limited notice about a forced relocation, being threatened with arrest for noncompliance, standing to lose one's personal property, and then being crammed into a warehouse sight unseen with 199 other individuals who have just gone through the same traumatic string of events will live on in our unhoused neighbor's experiences. For many, this trauma will serve as an impediment to their recovery from homelessness.

When our neighbors' rights are under attack, what do we do?

Stand up, fight back!

OUR DEMANDS TO PROTECT OUR UNHOUSED NEIGHBORS

Unhousing individuals must be able to be safe from sweeps, profiling, and criminalization.

The state cannot profile and criminalize our unhoused neighbors for standing on the sidewalk, sitting on a bench, or walking through downtown, which are all scenarios in which unhoused individuals were told they would have to relocate to the warehouse site under threat of arrest. Unhoused individuals must not be denied their rights to bodily autonomy, freedom of movement, and access to public space. No one should be forced to reside in the warehouse under threat of arrest simply because they are existing as an unhoused person in New Orleans – this is equivalent to internment.

All individuals who were subject to the state sweeps and had their items seized and/or transported by LA State Police must be reunited with their belongings immediately.

Individuals who have both remained at and left the warehouse are all mostly still unable to access the personal property from which they were separated during the 1/15/25 sweeps – they have not been able to see or retrieve their items or receive confirmation that their items will be able to be recovered. Individuals are missing their IDs, medications, family mementos, work tools, clothing, and more.

Those who have been relocated to the warehouse still need improved conditions.

Heating and plumbing issues must be fixed so that they can work consistently, flooding and a lack of sidewalks must be remediated for safety, and personal privacy levels and connections to transportation and services (medical, case management, substance use, etc.) must be increased.

Money must be invested in housing, rental assistance, and supportive services, and this investment must happen without discriminatory limitations.

The Governor has shown he can move quickly to reassign millions of dollars toward forcibly warehousing our neighbors. The state must act with the same speed, decisiveness, and investment into the humane, cost-effective solutions to homelessness: housing, rental assistance, and supportive services. These solutions cannot be limited based on the Governor's personal estimation of who is deserving – his proposed limitation that services access be tied to employment is especially troubling when considering many unhoused individuals are disabled, seeking work, and/or employed but unable to afford housing.

IF YOU SUPPORT THESE DEMANDS, TELL THE STATE - - - PHONE AND EMAIL ZAP

Office of the Governor
Jeff Landry
Constituent Services:
(225)342-0991 or (844)860-1413
Constituent.Services@la.gov

GOHSEP – Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness
General Office: (225) 925-7500
Director Email:
Jacques.thibodeaux@la.gov
Sandra Dugas, Hazard Mitigation:
Sandra.Dugas@la.gov // (225) 267-2737